

SOREDI: EDA Partial Progress Report @ 3.31.24

Covering October 1, 2023 - March 31, 2024

Key Activities:

- ✓ **Coordinated and served as fiscal manager and lead agency for Regional Innovation Hub planning grant.** Several regions in the state received this grant to explore the idea of developing a physical innovation hub. A steering committee of pertinent innovation partners, such as co-working spaces, technology companies, both local SBDC's, Rogue Community College, Southern Oregon University, and others, was formed to guide the process and hire a consultant.
 - The final report was completed in November 2023 and the steering committee explored next steps and applied for an implementation grant for \$250,000 to implement key strategies identified to hire a Steward to shepherd entrepreneurial activities with all service providers, focusing on better coordination, collaboration, and functionality of the existing ecosystem, rather than creation of a new entity or physical space.
 - SOREDI selected by the Committee to serve as fiscal manager and hire the Steward, who would be directed by the governing committee.
- ✓ **Completed Rural Capacity Grant for Southern Oregon.** All Oregon districts received approximately \$86,000 each in funds from Business Oregon and The Ford Family Foundation (TFFF) to aid small communities under 2500 in population. TFFF funds could also support larger communities under 35,000 in population. SOREDI sub-contracted with the Rogue Valley Council of Governments to provide these planning services.
 - A final report was completed and our region's \$86,000 leveraged over \$1 million in additional grant funds to the communities of Butte Falls, Jacksonville, Phoenix, Rogue River, and Talent. Most of the new funding received aided purchasing fire equipment, and fuel reduction services in the surrounding forests.
- ✓ **Coordinated and provided staff to the Oregon Connections Conference in Ashland, October 26-27.** This statewide telecommunications conference, now over 25 years in existence, was facilitated for 5 years in Southern Oregon by SOREDI and is now under the management of a separate non-profit. All funds and materials were transferred to the new entity.,
- ✓ **Brought back the Business Recruitment & Retention (BRR) Committee.** After a 3-year hiatus due to economic disruption, and lack of staff capacity, Business Development Manager Jaymes Tadlock brought back monthly meetings with local businesses and economic development partners on November 3, to work on coordinated business outreach visits, regional messaging, and more to expand SOREDI's reach into the business community to uncover needs and find resources to assist.
- ✓ **Promoted ribbon cutting for Pacific Wall Systems expansion to Phoenix on November 13.** This multi-year expansion project, assisted by SOREDI over two years, had considered several other local communities before a former secondary wood products facility near rail and with adequate room for expansion became available. Additional investments planned for this 15-year-old company with 80 employees overall.
- ✓ **Managed Business Development Revolving Loan Funds.** Two new loans were booked in this period for two restaurants – one in Ashland, one in Grants Pass. Funds used to purchase a former restaurant in Ashland and provide working capital for the Grants Pass entity. \$145,000 lent.

Continued to field inquiries and vet applications. Viable loans continue to be challenging due to a variety of issues including lack of collateral, high interest rates, insufficient financials.

- ✓ **Participated monthly with the new Southern Oregon Alliance of Physicians and Providers (SOAPP).** SOREDI is actively engaged in local efforts to promote the region's healthcare industry and attract medical professionals to Southern Oregon. Colleen Padilla and Jaymes Tadlock attended SOAPP's first annual gala event on March 2 and spoke to an audience of nearly 300, thanking providers for their service to the region and offering services to help them with employment referrals and connections.
- ✓ **Expanded quarterly meetings with Chamber of Commerce directors, to include Rogue Workforce Partnership and County leadership.** Renamed Regional Economic Vitality (REV) Chats, the meetings are held bi-monthly at SOREDI, when possible. The purpose is to ensure coordinated services, cross market business events, inform one another of key business activities, and help one another as needed.
- ✓ **Supported and attended multiple Chamber of Commerce events to connect with business leaders.**
 - Attended Medford Chamber of Commerce Annual Dinner, September
 - Attended Ashland Chamber of Commerce Annual Dinner, October
 - Attended Central Point Chamber of Commerce Annual Dinner & Awards, February
 - Attended Grants Pass Chamber of Commerce Annual Dinner & Awards, March
- ✓ **Coordinated three industry tours on October 23, January 24, and March 18.** The tours are sponsored by Rogue Workforce Partnership and the Southern Oregon Educational District. Sponsorship support provides complimentary attendance for educators allowing them to connect on the job skills with future workforce needs and align curriculum accordingly. New this year are stops at an area high school, when possible, respective to the tour's theme. 25-30 attendance at each.
 - The October tour "All About Manufacturing" included stops are Erickson, Inc., Boise Cascade, Medford Fabrication, and Phoenix High School.
 - In January, the "Deconstructed Date Night" tour focused on the entertainment and hospitality industry with stops at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Ashland Springs Hotel, and Branson Chocolates.
 - In March, the tour returned to focusing on White City Manufacturers including Carestream, Croman Corp., and Highway Products, followed by a stop at Crater High School in Central Point.
- ✓ **Facilitated multiple Butte Falls Business Community economic vitality meetings.** This group includes the mayor and 5-8 small businesses who are working to update their discovery tours, create business signage near the water falls to attract visitors to the town, and develop promotional materials for visitors attending events such as Heritage Day, the 4th of July Parade, and other prospective events. These meetings are held monthly.
- ✓ **Participated in key economic development and workforce events to connect with peers, discuss post-pandemic strategies and best practices.**
 - Annual leadership summit for the Oregon Economic Development Association (OEDA), October 8-10, Eugene. Attended by Terrill Roper and Amy Browne – who completed her Oregon certified economic development credential.

- Wildfire Summit in October 30-31, Eugene. Attended by Terrill Roper and Colleen Padilla.
 - Working Together Conference with the Oregon Employment Department and Oregon's workforce investment boards, November 7-8 in Bend, attended by Jaymes Tadlock.
 - National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) Annual Leadership Forum, November 7-10, Cleveland, attended by Colleen Padilla.
 - Oregon Leadership Summit in Portland, December 11, attended by Colleen Padilla.
- ✓ **Co-hosted and coordinated the second annual elected official's mixer and orientation event with the Rogue Valley Council of Governments (RVCOG).** This event, held on January 29, served to appreciate all elected officials, and provided introductory information to newly elected leaders about several regional agencies – including SOREDI, RVCOG, and Rogue Workforce Partnership. Twelve of 15 jurisdictions were represented and nearly 40 attended, including 5 State representatives. Central Point City Hall provided the venue.
- ✓ **Hosted Second Annual State of the Rogue Valley Breakfast on February 29.** The keynote speakers were a State of Oregon economist and national site selector. Industry panel included: Pacific Wall Systems (Phoenix), Met One (Grants Pass), and Valley Immediate Care (Medford), representing three key industries – healthcare, wood products manufacturing, and technology. An additional panel included 4 entrepreneurial/business service organizations (Chamber, SBDC, entrepreneur and workforce investment board) sharing broadly on various effective partnerships in the region. Nearly 220 guest in attendance.
- ✓ **Created and Distributed our One Rogue Valley CEDS Report (July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2025).** This was the first publication of its kind for SOREDI to demonstrate outcomes and share stories of local business expansions/successes, over the previous 3 years during the pandemic, wildfires and other disruption in the economy. The publication was 20 pages and paid for by underwriters.
- ✓ **Completed Enterprise Zone annual filings, in partnership with both county assessors' offices.** SOREDI has served as the enterprise zone manager for 4 different zones in our region since 1989.
- Annual filings, due by April 1 each year, included conversation and direct assistance to 30 open applicants – a mix of manufacturing, distribution centers, headquarters, and hotels.
 - One new enterprise zone authorization during this period for a Medford distributor's new facility investment of \$5.5m, and creation of 1 new job.
- ✓ **Participated in monthly meetings of the PIER Selection Committee.** This 5-person committee consisted of SOREDI, the Jackson County Community Long Term Recovery Group, the cities of Phoenix and Talent, and Jackson County. The group was created following the Labor Day fires of 2020, and advocated with the State of Oregon in May 2022, to create set aside funds to help businesses impacted by the devastating fires.
- While awards to 4 applicants were recommended by the Selection Committee to Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS), and some funds were held back for future relevant projects, the program has stalled with OHCS, and no funds have yet been released.
 - This has caused Jackson County to issue a formal complaint to the Governor and Secretary of State, requesting a formal audit of OHCS.
 - The PIER Selection Committee has ceased to meet until further notice; unfortunately, the business community continues to be impacted.

- ✓ **Participated in multiple community and regional collaborative economic development committees, roundtables, and initiatives.** These include serving as a partner in the Medford 2040 Vision Committee, Medford Unites (Medford 549c School District), the Collaborative Economic Development Committee in Grants Pass/Josephine County, the Foster Ashland Business Committee, the Grants Pass Business Retention & Expansion Committee, and both SOU SBDC and RCC SBDC advisory committees.
- ✓ **Wrote ten unique support letters in connection to the One Rogue Valley CEDS.** These included: Timber HP, Medford Congressional District Spending, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Regional Innovation Hub, Medford (MFR) Regional Airport, Holly Theatre, A Greater Applegate, Butte Falls, Josephine County Library, and Clayste Energy Systems (SBIR).

Constraints and Challenges:

- ✓ Slow and ineffective State processes and timelines change frequently, making it difficult to staff accordingly.
- ✓ Demand for services that exceed staff capacity and/or expertise.
- ✓ High interest rates make loans more difficult and unattainable for many startups and small companies.
- ✓ High inflation and rising health care costs continue to impact operating funds for the agency.

Thank you for your continuing support.

Colleen Padilla, Executive Director
7/3/24